A Bedouin lover

William Allen Knight

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BY

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"The Song of Our Syrian Guest," etc.

THE PILGRIM PRESS

NEW YORK BOSTON CHICAGO

MCMXIII

Published, October, 1913

The Plimpton Press, Norwood, Mass., U. S. A.

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The illustrations are contributed by the author's friends, the photographers of the American Colony, Jerusalem.

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"ALLAH LOVES A LOVER"

Every successive generation of lovers hallows anew this weary world. The light of their eyes is brighter than the sun, the treasure in their hearts is beyond estimate. They perpetually renew the meaning of existence, and convert the old earth into a scene of endless romance and tenderness. Where is there a hill or valley, stream or lake, city or shore, that is not invested with the sanctity of the lover's dream and passion? The planet rolls in an atmosphere fifty miles in depth, but deeper far, purer and richer infinitely, is that other atmosphere in which it flies, created out of the heart of the immemorial succession of lovers.

—George A. Gordon,
"Through Man to God."

A BEDOUIN LOVER

I

"ALLAH LOVES A LOVER"

"I YOUR servant, my gentleman." A bearded young man stepped out between a hectoring band and me. A mantled head, encircled by a double coil of black rope, bowed very low.

I thought he was mocking me. Vexed by these long-robed sons of Adam, I came near spurning pearls which a favoring Providence was casting before me. This story shall at least part me from the unsavory company to which Scripture assigns a man in that case, if it do no more than show a goodly pearl or two brought over seas for my friends.

It was a radiant morning. The balm of Egypt's air imparted delight to the simple routine of breathing. The Nile valley's miracle of fresh life was uncovered as the sunlight lifted

each lingering veil of mist, and wherever the eye turned was outspread a carnival of colors canopied by skies of purest blue.

On the western edge of the valley, near where I stood, lay the palm-shaded grounds of the Mena House, memorable for restfulness among Levantine abodes for the traveler. Thence a shimmering road wound through sand and sunshine up to the Pyramids of Gizeh on the ridge rimming the valley. They stand, these three tomb-piles tapering skyward, like fortresses between life and death; for before them lies the blooming valley, and behind them—the desert.

It was still early morning, and few travelers were as yet in the open. Once outside the hotel grounds, therefore, I was besieged in full force. Beggars squatting in the sunshine swarmed around me, and venders of scarabs, rusty coins, picture cards, bead chains, huge oranges, necklaces of green stone-ware cats, ornamented fly-brushes, and heaven may know what else. Donkey boys pressed their red-saddled little creatures upon me until they twitched their long ears against my person. Cameleers led their gaunt velvet-footed beasts athwart my way in

hope of compelling me to mount at least one of them. And all set up a babel of solicitations and a jumble of ingratiating activities.

But so charming was the morning's splendor and serenity that good nature endured the ordeal until I had cleared the mongrel disturbers of my peace and only a pleading donkey boy or two, a Bedouin guide, or a jabbering scarab seller, taking heart of hope, still dogged my steps. But I waved them off to the last, and resolutely gave myself to the spell of the view which opened fuller beauty as the road ascended.

There it was, the ancient delight of journeying men. Wherever the river went, everything lived. Green covered the bottom lands — green and the multi-colored brightness of crop-blossoms and flowers. Palm trees lifted their spreading tops like islands afloat in the mist still lingering over water levels. The moving colors of a peasant's garb or the trappings of camel or donkey caught the sunlight here and there, and the glint of windows or burnished metal flashed rapturously. The sound of calling voices or the cadence of a song such as Arab throats are wont to quaver was heard rising through the still air. In the distance the roofs

and minarets of Cairo gleamed, and streamers of smoke dreamily floated upward. Beyond, across the valley's expanse, shimmered the gray cliffs of the Mokattam hills — the hills whence were brought the stones that now, as for some thousands of years, dully gaze back to their ancient home from the pyramids on the valley's western boundary.

Before such a vision the joyousness of boyhood will tingle through a body long harness-laden. What are the few years of manhood's care and toil before the tranquil freshness of that centuried valley! Such is the magic of Egypt when winter is still on Christian lands.

But manhood can scarcely expect to be like boyhood for long, no matter how entrancing surroundings may be. Tribulation is part of a man's dower, for some reason doubtless better understood in heaven than on earth. At any rate, half way up the road a group of figures, clad in long gowns and turbaned Arab fashion, arose from a low wall on which they were perched at my approach. Merrily, yes, merrily as old friends they welcomed me, offering their services in chorus. When I bade them go away their bearing was that of benevolent surprise. "What! Leave a

gentleman like you unattended?" they seemed to say; "Never!"

Prattling persistently, they came nearer. I turned on them, protesting that they knew better than to annoy a man so ruthlessly. Being a rather genteel lot, their thrifty robes and keen faces seemed to warrant such an appeal; and so resolutely did I face them with my demands that they paused and stood silent. Just then something happened.

Quickly and with the aspect of firm intent, a tall form stepped out from his companions and stood eyeing me. His quiet agility was enough to set a lone stranger wondering.

He was clad in a long dark blue garment with white showing underneath from throat to bare feet, and a white scarf confined on his head by two rounds of black rope mantled neck and shoulders, half hiding his face. Rather feminine apparel to western eyes; but in the east it proclaims the Bedouin — the desert man of untamed Arab blood. His chocolate face and hands showed out against his robe with the effect of disclosure; there was a sinewy masculine body within that womanish garb. Besides all this, he eyed me with a certain tilt of head which, as I had ob-

served the human species in divers lands, indicated watchful and purposeful action, not to say bravado.

I had read what the careful Baedeker was moved to write of these selfsame fellows, how "the Bedouins of Gizeh who surround and importune travelers long before the pyramids are reached, are very pertinacious in their attentions and exorbitant in their demands." And of the Bedouins in another region he records that they conducted themselves much better than "their rapacious brethren of Gizeh," thus venting an ebullient memory.

I suddenly decided that a counsel of war was advisable. What were they about to do with me? It came into my consciousness that these muscular young men could do what they chose with a lone man beside their pyramids in the early morning — and the only human form to behold was the Sphinx! Perhaps I had gone too far in my vigorous remonstrance under such circumstances. In fact, my stout walking stick was in air against them when the young Moslem confronted me as already described.

"I your servant, my gentleman," he repeated, with the same disconcerting resoluteness and

eyelight. This was too much for Kentucky blood.

"The mischief you are! — Imshi!" broke on the still air. That last word was a scornful "Away with you!" to Arab ears.

The watching band laughed; among themselves they ejaculated, "Skidoo, Twenty-three!" returning my compliment in the use of Arabic by displaying their knowledge of the American equivalent. But not one of them budged. All stood watching the man who had proclaimed himself my servant. As for him, he stepped nearer unabashed, and with gravity unswerving said: "You no want these boys to bother you. I your servant. You say, 'Begone to them, Saïd!' Very nice. I keep them away; they bother you not — no more."

This clean-cut master of the situation, by one whose name I now knew to be Saïd, was captivating even to the victim of such obvious highwaymanry. And to heighten its appeal, the young man's face lighted up with a look which seemed to assure me that he and I would stand together against the field.

"If you will keep those fellows away," said I, "and leave me alone yourself except when I call

you, I will pay you as my servant at the week's end. But if one of you follows me or bothers me when I come up here to see the pyramids and the desert and that valley — not a piastre, not a single piastre."

"I your servant, my gentleman." He bowed in acknowledgment of his commission. Then he turned, spoke a few Arabic words in a tone of authority, and waved his arm to the band. They withdrew — my word of honor for it! — they withdrew in merry silence; all save one.

The man who did not heed the new authority glided toward me. He was obviously past mid-life, but how far beyond that somewhat vague milestone in the stretch of earthly years, it was hard to judge. He was grizzled and a trifle stooped. But men wrinkle fast in the desert's glare, and the languor of serving bodies shows early in their carriage. The chief indicator of being past his prime was the lack-luster pensiveness of eye, together with the non-conforming sense of personal priority in which his associates indulged him. Because of this he received my forbearance for the moment. A man in the

strength of his years often manifests his own prime qualities by patience with his elders.

"I Mark Twain — Mark Twain, Yankee Doodle!" this man declared with extended palms. He seemed sure of winning my favor by that charmed name and by calling me Yankee Doodle. Saïd protested mildly in discharge of his newly acquired responsibility. But his words availed nothing.

"Mark Twain he come here — from your country. I hees servant. I show heem here — all where he go. I run zees pyramid for heem. Yankee Doodle, I your servant also!"

So quaint was his appeal that it was hard to conceal my interest. Was he lying, or was he demented, or was it a bit of Arab horse-play? Saïd's face gave no hint. Yet there was something in his eyes that led me to refrain from summary judgment. A genial grin lingered on the old face upturned to mine, beseeching my patriotic adherence to the choice of my distinguished fellow-countryman.

"Did he, Saïd? Did he know Mark Twain?"

"Quite true, my gentleman, quite true," was the grave answer.

A BEDOUIN LOVER

Mindful of the beloved American whom the world just then knew to be in a sorrow that befell his old age, I bade Saïd let the man thus accredited follow us. What if some fresh glimpse of "The Innocents Abroad" should be vouchsafed me!

"He come here, he all white on hees head," the old guide hastened to babble. "He walk like zees — seeque in hees leg." The man stooped and limped, to uncover this memory of days long lighted by how many smiles. "I hees servant, Yankee Doodle."

Still I lingered listening. Who would not? The pyramid of Cheops loomed over me; the head of the Sphinx was seen beyond facing the morning splendor. But even so, I listened to this man. Presently the reward of patience came in rich abundance. "Mark Twain send me letter two five week before now.— Hees daughter, she very seeque."

Could that be possible? Had a letter from Mark Twain — a letter mentioning a matter so personal — come to this Bedouin? Of course I did not believe such an absurdity. But the mere claim, the oddity and daring of it, aroused keen curiosity. At sight of my incredulous interest

he produced a letter. It was of that winter's date. It bore what seemed to be the fame-lit signature. In a half page of words it requested good care for one who was on the way to Egypt. And at the end — yes, there they were, a few words about the daughter's illness; few, but there the words were!

How on earth could it have come about that relations had been kept up through so many years between such sundered men? I know absolutely nothing about that. Indeed, though it instantly occurred to me, this question was forgot in my astonishment and what followed.

The hearts of men everywhere had been touched just then by the news of this daughter's tragic death. A sense of awe came upon me while holding the letter with the Bedouin's fingers near mine. What would it mean to men who had daughters the world over if they could hear this bit of knowledge that had come to me — that this world man, this wit of all humanity, was such a father that even in a business note to an old Egyptian guide he had not shut out the shadow of a daughter's suffering! How little the world dreams what love is to its great ones!

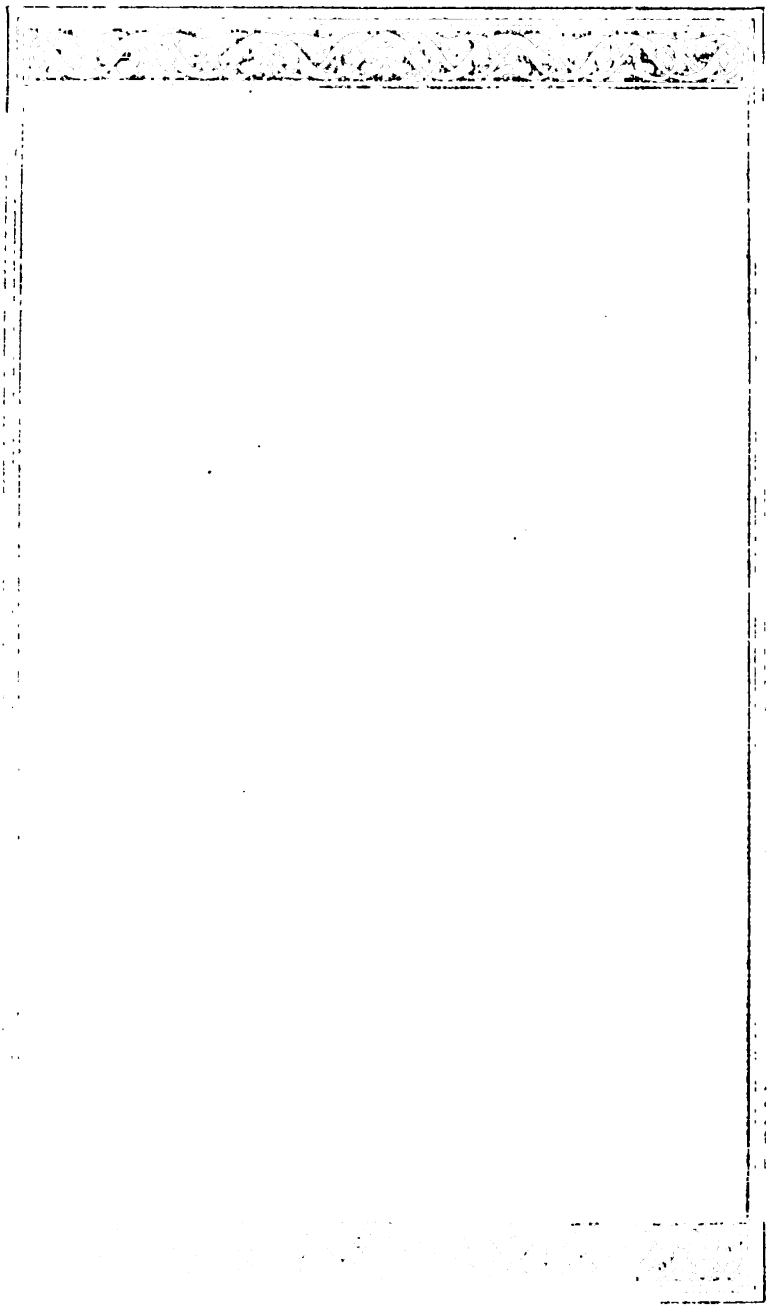
While folding the letter, as if divining my thoughts the Bedouin pointed to the top of the Cheops pyramid, and said: "Up there he say to me, 'You got a leetle Bedawee or two, Abdul, I guess.' I run down — up, down —. up, on zee pyramid for heem. He watch. I come up top by heem. Zen he say to me, 'I give you hundred dollar if you jump off here head first.' All laugh. I say No. Zen he say it to me —'You got a leetle Bedawee or two, Abdul, I guess.' My wife had not give me no child yet. I was full of shame — me, strong young man, and no child! — so I make no answer. Soon he say, 'Oh — I see.' By and by, like he pull up water from deep place — so slow — he say, 'Well, Allah love a lover, I guess; don't you forget it, young man.' I forget it not; long time I say in my heart, 'He tell me Allah love a lover.' I no send my wife from me! And for sure, I got plenty children now — one girl also!" The weathered face deepened its wrinkles to hold the smile that overspread them.

At length we managed, Saïd and I, to disengage ourselves. The pyramids had been waiting some thousands of years, and so had the Sphinx.

I was eager not to prolong unduly my delay in coming to view them.

As the old man left us he called back, "You see Mark Twain over in your country, Yankee Doodle, tell heem hees servant of Gizeh have heem in hees heart!"

When we two had gone a little way toward Cheops and were quite alone, Saïd spoke. "Hiss daughter iss wife to me, my gentleman," said he.



II

WHAT THE SPHINX IS WATCHING

After years of waiting, it was before me at last. The great face was so sad, so earnest, so longing, so patient. There was a dignity not of earth in its mien, and in its countenance a benignity such as never anything human wore. * * * It was thinking of the wars of departed ages; of the empires it had seen created and destroyed; of the nations whose birth it had witnessed, whose progress it had watched, whose annihilation it had noted; of the joy and sorrow, the life and death, the grandeur and decay, of five thousand slow revolving years. It was the type of an attribute of man — of a faculty of his heart and brain. It was Memory — Retrospection — wrought into visible, tangible form. All who know what pathos there is in memories of days that are accomplished and faces that have vanished * * * will have some appreciation of the pathos that dwells in these grave eyes. * * * The sphinx is grand in its loneliness. * * * And there is that in the overshadowing majesty of this eternal figure of stone, with its accusing memory of the deeds of all ages, which reveals to one something of what he shall feel when he shall stand at last in the awful presence of God.

—Mark Twain.
"The Innocents Abroad."

II

WHAT THE SPHINX IS WATCHING

SAÏD made good his agreement in the days that followed without further mutiny. I saw other visitors beset by the infesting Bedouins; the babel of their bickering and righteous wrath was heard from morning until sundown. But as for myself — it was like a man seeming to have a charmed life on a battlefield.

Now and then one of the clan would start toward me with the now familiar suavity of onset; but something always stopped him. Standing at a respectful distance he would say, "Saïd your servant!" while I passed on. Occasionally Saïd himself was seen, plying his vocation among tourists. Sometimes he would turn aside at sight of me and come near enough to inquire, "Any these boys bother you?" or whether he

could do anything for me. On being assured that all was well, he would withdraw, perhaps remarking, "If any these fellows bother you, just say to him, 'Saïd my servant.'— He go away, my gentleman." And so it was, day after day.

He had not received a franc or even a piastre from me as yet. Why he should trust my promise — "the word of a Frank" as he would say — so unfalteringly, was as great a puzzle as how he managed to fulfil his contract to the letter. But it was enough that the sanctities of contemplation, there where the hoary pyramids bear their mute message out of the vanished past, there where the still desert awes and the Nile valley entrances, were as inviolate for me as for the Sphinx itself.

One afternoon there chanced to be scarcely any sight-seers about the pyramids. The heat was such that cool drinks on the verandas of the Mena House were the summum bonum for those who were there; besides, some sort of spectacular affair was in progress over in Cairo. Only now and then did a party of tourists straggle through the sand around the pyramids.

I was sitting on the shady side of Cheops, which of an afternoon is the one facing the river

valley. The slopes of these pyramids are terraced by the layers of great stones, each being set in so as to leave a strip on the one below it uncovered. I had climbed up a few terraces — not many, for the languor of the somnolent day was upon my body — just high enough to feel the dream-breathing that was softly stirring the air. Below, a short distance over the sand to the right, rose the head of the Sphinx. It was contemplating the eastward view, unsatiated after years of brooding — gazing on the vision I was beholding for a mere hour or two. Why seek to word one's thoughts under such circumstances? It is enough to say that I seemed then to understand why some master spirit of the long ago was moved to set this eternal watcher in stone there where it would look forever on the mystery of life in the midst of encompassing death — all but smiling, with the tomb-piles and the desert behind it, the river's wonderland and the sunrise hills before! O Egypt, how man as a lover registered his heart beats of old under the spell of your wooing!

A few days before we had laid one who traveled with us in a grave at Alexandria — laid his tall form down at Egypt's threshold. I, who had

been ill beside him, was left to journey on. A man may be indulged in musings after such an experience. Pulsing in my ears day and night the cadence of these words was heard:

He sleeps beside thy seaward shore,
Thou Motherland whose flowing river
Hath made thee from of old the giver
Of rest to pilgrims travel-sore!

Wilt thou not guard him? Deserts heap
Their sands anear, but cannot lure thee;
From death thy faithful streams secure thee —
Wilt thou not guard his pilgrim sleep?

Against yon endless siege of sand
Thy mighty dead of old are hid
In many a towering pyramid —
Like forts against thy foe they stand.

Oh, beauteous are thy plumèd palms,
And wondrous fair thy great green valley!
The powers of Life within thee rally
And lie entrenched in holy calms.

Life's emblems mark thine ancient tombs;
Thy temples teemed with lotus flowers;
When man was young a hope like ours
Was writ in stone where Egypt blooms.

A priest of Life was he, our dead!
Amid earth's waste there is a river
The streams whereof from death deliver;
Its life, more sweet than thine, he spread.

WHAT THE SPHINX IS WATCHING

He sleeps whom now to thee we bring,
He sleeps beside thine ancient portal;
He waits the Lord of Life immortal —
Keep watch, and hail his coming King!

While these lines were still in mind I chanced to observe a white headgear showing out from behind a corner of the pyramid. It was Saïd. He was taking a look at me — but very carefully lest he disturb when not wanted. On seeing that he was observed he stepped into full view, then seated himself on the tier of stones next to the sand. Time was nothing worth to him that day.

"You want your servant not, my gentleman?" he called after silence.

"Come up here beside me."

His bare feet were heard slapping the stones as he climbed up, so hushed was all about us, so resonant the pyramid's slope.

"Sit down, Saïd. We will have a little talk to pass the time."

He dropped down on the stones a terrace or two below me.

"Not much to do to-day, I see."

"Not much for me; you been watching something a long while, my gentleman. I keep

these boys away from here — that iss all for me."

"Don't you know what I have been looking at?"

"What the Sphinx iss watching, maybe."

"And what do you think that is?"

"What we can not see with eyes, my gentleman — all about everything."

I perceived that in his Arab soul might be found a mirror reflecting I knew not how many things not seen with eyes.

Meanwhile several of his associates had appeared round the corner of the pyramid, and one after another had approached us by stages, squatting in the sand at each advance to watch developments. Saïd glanced down anxiously but seemed to await some sign or word from me. When they had progressed close to the base of the pyramid I observed a curious performance by one of them.

This man was heaping the sand in a pointed little pile, spreading his arms over it, and bending his ear close to the heap as the sand trickled down its sides. This he did over and over, always looking up at us beseechingly but uttering no words above a weird mumbling.

"What is he doing, Saïd?"

"Hearing the sand talk, my gentleman."

"The sand talk? What do you mean? And what does he want of me?"

"He fortune teller — he hear what the sand say. He would tell you what it say."

"About what?"

"About things we can not see with eyes." He explained in his own quaint way that this man had seen me gazing from the pyramid's side a long time and had reckoned me a fit subject for his mystical arts.

"Send the others away — let the fortune teller stay," said I.

Saïd rose to his full height. What the words gulped up Arab fashion may have been, my ears could not record; but he uttered something that cleared the sand of squatters — of all except the fortune teller. There he crouched alone, heaping afresh his tiny pyramid of sand at the base of Cheops, with expectant face upturned and many a wand-waving movement of his arms — the Sphinx and Egypt's glory for background!

"He learned it all in Algiers," Saïd remarked, half in approbation but with a shade of occidental misgiving to show due regard for me.

"Algiers?"

For answer Saïd pointed straight through the pyramid's huge bulk toward the desert.

"How far is that from here?"

"Ninety days as the camel trot."

How men draw their speech out of their own lives — out of the things they know by experience! If I had been answering that question, recalling Algiers as we saw it on our journey eastward, I should have said, "A long way back toward my homeland — back toward my dear ones." But to a son of the desert, it was "ninety days as the camel trot."

At Saïd's suggestion I slipped to a lower tier of stones and dropped a coin into the sand — into the circle drawn around the fortune teller's now strangely animated heap. Under his gesticulations the sand seemed to be alive indeed, seemed to be running and fairly leaping down the diminutive slopes as fast as his circling hands wooed it to the mound's top. Again and again he bent low to listen. I could almost hear the patter of elfin feet myself!

Then a soft murmuring began. A rapt expression spread over the swarthy face.

"Tell me what he says — if he says anything," I whispered.

The murmur sank to a guttural monody — a quavering gurgle of wrenched intonation — then rose to a bubbling chant — and then a thin stream of sound rippled in the afternoon's vast silence.

Meanwhile Saïd was speaking low beside me. "He hear a very small voice somewhere down in the sand. It say — many times it say, 'That man, he love — that man, he love — he love, he love, he love'!"

When the murmur deepened as before mentioned, there was a quick glance from Saïd. He paused.

The fortune teller's hands, plying with swift twirls along the sides of the heap, seemed to have set all the midget sands into a frenzy of speed, so headlong did they rush down the smooth slopes the instant his light touch whisked them up to the pinnacle again. His face was rigid; he breathed with fitful puffing at the lips; sweat-drops trickled wherever his skin showed and spotted the white sand; his unceasing utterance appeared likely to choke him outright presently.

Saïd seeing that I did not wince, bent down to listen. "He see in the sand much running to hide — wind blow — dark in the heben — flash! — rain begin — it pour. While the wind blow and the rain roar down, he hear that little voice again — it call somewhere out of sight. It say, 'Poor man, poor man, poor man'!"

The fortune teller, wholly absorbed in extracting the mysteries of his art until this crisis was reached, now raised his distorted countenance and stretched up his hands imploringly. His lips were mumbling, his eyes rolled. Was his pagan heart moved to beseech heaven on my behalf in the dismal situation?

I ventured to ask Saïd for the meaning of this sudden shift. His eyes met mine reluctantly.

"He want — pardon, my gentleman! — more baksheesh. If you please to do so, give a franc."

It was a startling drop from what I had almost half believed the fortune teller was doing just then. But it occurred to me that this well-timed episode, at least, was notably true to life as sundry experiences lay in my memory — so nearly alike in appearance are self-interest and prayerfulness among men; and besides, I was a bit curious to know the outcome of that storm

scene. That, also, was not essentially unlike certain recollections of mine. Therefore I found a franc and bade Saïd toss it into the man's circle in the sand.

There was a sound as of chortling, an opening and closing of eyelids as when one all but wakes and sleeps yet more. Then the voice rose into chantlike tones which seemed to bubble, as before recorded.

Saïd gave ear. His eyes brightened. Soon he began to give report for me. "Once more he hear that same little voice. It sing now! It say while it sing, 'Blow — that man, he love! Rain — that man, he love! Dark — he love, he love, he love'!"

At last from the fortune teller was heard a rippling flow of speech. The light of a wan smile played over the face whence it came.

"What is he saying now, Saïd?" One may be pardoned the eagerness that uttered this enquiry aloud at such a juncture.

Saïd made it clear that the tempest had past; and at evening time there was light! Yes, the sun was going down in such a tranquil sky that life's billowy desert lay all lustrous in its backlight and the clouds were transformed into a

peaceful picture-land. He did not use these words, but this is the meaning of what he said. By dint of much explaining on the part of my faithful servant, and interpretation into customary English of a few odd phrases — "much more nice" for best and the like — I found that the fortune teller was uttering something at the last which may be given faithful rendering as follows:

"Go east, go west,
Go east, go west,
The camel is good
But his tent is best."

"Did he hear the little voice say that, Saïd?" I asked.

Saïd spoke with the fortune teller. When their Arabic chatter had ended, while the wizard gazed up at me with solemn eyes Saïd announced, 'He say the small little voice have gone to sleep in the sand. He see all the little sand people run and stand round this one that are so full of sleep. And while they stand in a circle round it they all sing those words, my gentleman. Then they all lie down, too, round that little voice."

III

IN A QUEEN'S CHAMBER

Ah! Blessed Lord! Oh, High Deliverer!
Forgive this feeble script, which doth Thee wrong
Measuring with little wit Thy lofty love.
Ah! Lover! Brother! Guide! Lamp of the Law!
I take my refuge in Thy Name and Thee!
I take my refuge in Thy Law of Good!
I take my refuge in Thy Order! Om!
The dew is on the lotus! — Rise, Great Sun!

— Sir Edwin Arnold.
"The Light of Asia."

III

IN A QUEEN'S CHAMBER

PRESENTLY the fortune teller sauntered off, singing as he went — some care-free yet plaintive song such as one often hears in Arab lands, rising as naturally as a brook's purling. A wave of Saïd's hand had followed the extra coin tossed into the grayish palms, and he was gone.

The young Bedouin with whom I was thus left alone watched him until form and voice vanished over a hillock of sand. Then, for a moment, he turned a pensive gaze toward a patch of green just within the reach of the river's outspread and barely beyond the desert's. Some sort of peasant abode was there. Because of a clump of foliage round it I was uncertain whether it was hut or black tent of the flat Bedouin type, when his liquid dark eyes met mine. Instantly I per-

ceived that the words of the small voice in the sand had not vanished with their now jocund conjurer — not for Saïd.

It was by no means easy to master my eagerness to ask a question which has doubtless occurred also to the reader of this narrative. But I knew Saïd's heart would not open if my approach was unskilful. The Arab soul is full of sentiment amid its stern encasement and callous behaviour; and like water in flinty rock, once the barriers are penetrated, it flows clear and sweet. But to secure this result one must conform to the ways of Arab folk, specially the Bedouins, and they come to any subject of a personal nature with unhurrying indirectness. They pay the compliment of knocking and waiting for the door to be opened, so to speak. To open it from without were an affront. There may be women within, you see! Therefore my question was held back.

Three small pyramids stood in the sand before us — a little to the right, on the way to the Sphinx.

"What are those, Saïd?" I asked, as if quite unmindful of the fortune teller and his utterances.

"You know not? — pardon, my gentleman — You know not? How strange that you should ask of them at this moment! They are tombs of hiss daughters — the daughters of King Cheops who built this great pyramid for hiss own tomb."

The water was beginning to trickle through the rock! The connection in his mind between the subject of my enquiry and the fortune teller's pronouncements was not difficult to trace. Even this ancient pharaoh, notwithstanding the hardness of heart attributed to him and his lordly breed, was also a man who loved! His daughters were given little pyramids before his own monster pile — and they were placed toward the land of the life-giving river, under the guard of the Sphinx!

The shadow of the father's pyramid reached far out on the sand now. It covered with its shelter the three small tombs, all save their tops; on them the sun's rays still shone. The turn of the long day toward evening was in the air.

I rose to my feet. "Come and walk with me, Saïd." He sprang up at once.

"Would not this be a good time to take me inside one of the pyramids?"

"Certainly — very nice time. Which would you wish, my gentleman?"

"Whichever one you would like best to show me."

Saïd pondered.

"We will go to the pyramid of Menkewrē, if you please — the third pyramid, as they say of it. You would wish, I think, to see at this time the Queen's chamber which is there."

The water was now dripping from the rock to the sand! What cared I if the third pyramid was somewhat the smaller of the huge trinity of Gizeh? What were the dry old piles to me — what the mammoth dimensions of one or another? A rill of human affection was starting and soon would be rippling around them! Perchance it would lead to a glimpse of some long dried nook wherein love's flow had left its mark ages before. Had not Saïd's eyes kindled at the mention of the small pyramids where those daughters of long ago were buried? Had he not proposed of his own choice to show me a queen's chamber? And clearly all this had something to do with the words of the fortune teller.

"Yes, let it be the pyramid of Menkewrē,"

sand I, relishing the sound of that euphonious name.

We took our way around the southern side of Cheops. A bevy of Bedouins appeared, as if springing out of the sand, and followed us at a cautious venture. A signal from Saïd halted them. But they still watched us from a distance.

"They all seem to know you," I remarked by way of recognition. "How is it that they obey you so well?"

Saïd smiled. "I know them; they know me. After long time, my gentleman, they learn to do so — as you say it."

This was his first reference to his personal life. The water was forming a tiny pool! How should I set it flowing?

"So you are all friends together. I notice that some of you wear red turbans and some white. Does that mark any difference between you?" This seemed sufficiently remote from heart matters. But it proved the gate to the very path I wished to follow.

"Much difference — much difference, my gentleman. Those who wear the red turban are Christian. Only Mohammedan man may wear on hiss head our white turban."

"Oh, I see.—How do you get along together?"

"Get along? I understand that not.—Get along?"

When explanation had been made, he assured me that they had little trouble about the pyramids on the score of religion. They maintained a working comity, it appeared, in their mutual business. "Quite nice," was his pleasant summary of their manner of life together. "We pray to the same God," he added. "We all Christian once; then come Mohammed the prophet." The rest he left unsaid, with the instinct of the gentleman that he was.

"Go on, Saïd. You and I are friends, and I would like to have you tell me about your religion." I bethought myself of how near religion lies to the heart-life of men in all lands. But little did I foresee, let it be here confessed, how rich was to be the reward of remembering this nearness in dealing even with a son of the desert.

"I tell you, my gentleman — certainly." Lifting his eyes to the desert's unbounded sky he began, "No man know what of us in the heben — no man."

IN A QUEEN'S CHAMBER

We had just passed the wall of rock near the second pyramid whereon is still seen the sacred picture-writing chiseled there — ancient hieroglyphics which are said to declare that some man "shines in the House of the Great"— and had come to a cavernous tomb hewn in the rock, the roof of which is cut to resemble palm tree trunks. Before the entrance to this tomb Saïd stopped in deep meditation. Presently he drew diverging lines in the sand. Pointing to the line on the right, he continued:

"Here, I go good — this way out, good there." He pointed skyward. Then he slowly traced the other line with a gesture. "Here, I go bad — this way out, bad there." He paused to observe whether I understood.

"We are alike so far, Saïd. Now suppose a man goes along this line, this bad line, and after a while wants to change and go along this good line — then how is it?"

"Now let me show you the reason, my gentleman," he answered, meaning the explanation. "A man go on bad — when he twenty-five, thirty, like me, he say, 'I will go bad no more, I come over here and go on good'— good for him there. Our God — he iss the one God! — he

leave all that bad he have done away from him; he give nice help — good health, pleasant wife, plenty children, all that. But a man forty, forty-five, like you, he say, 'I will come over here and go good'— he go not good — bad for him there."

"But if the older man is in earnest, Saïd — if he really tries to turn from bad to good — what is there in your religion to help him?" Careful not to offend, I explained how the Christian Jesus died to save men from the bad and help any who would to go forward over on the good line.

"What for he die? How he help if he dead?"

Never have I wished for a gifted tongue more than at that moment. Ah, that mystery of life through death! But I did my best to make it plain to Saïd — told how by dying the Christian Savior showed God's love, his forgiving goodness — told how men are thereby drawn from the bad and strengthened for the way that is good. "You know," said I, "how a man feels toward one who loves him enough to die for him."

The black eyes rested their gaze upon mine. But his lips were silent.

"Have you not something like that in your religion, Saïd — something to help a man who tries and fails by what love can do?"

He thought a moment. His fingers sought his forehead. "This help — ah, I no just get it into words. This iss it, my gentleman! This God business — God business! I understand not this God business of help for a man that go bad."

I saw that he had not uttered all he would speak, and therefore held my peace. Soon, like pent water set free to flow, these words sounded, "But I know what love that die and love that live can do for a man — I myself know that, my gentleman."

We had now reached the pyramid of Menkewrē. An old Arab who had established himself at the entrance to its interior suddenly beset us demanding baksheesh before we should enter the hole in the mountain of stone. Saïd was at once engaged in shielding me from this grizzled pirate of the sand-sea. It was bare-faced brigandage, without a trace of warrant in any service rendered or desired. In fact, the one thing I wanted most of all just then was to be left alone with Saïd. But the old man, to give substance to his claim, entered the opening, lighted a can-

dle, and emitted raucous calls with beckonings to follow him.

I shook my head, then obdurately turned and gazed over the desert's expanse. Behind me, in that dark little cavity, clashed a war of words; before, a soundless serenity lay shimmering. At length Saïd stepped to my side. "Come, my gentleman," said he with the utmost quietude.

The old Arab had withdrawn from the entrance and stood some distance off in token that I might enter unmolested. Later I learned that Saïd had himself purchased our immunity, and had actually contrived that the hoary vagabond should perpetrate his piratical imposition with redoubled vim on any who approached the passage during our stay therein.

Down the shaft we two crept. It is barely large enough for a man to shuffle along sitting on his heels, and it descends through rock a hundred feet or more before it reaches level footing. Saïd went before bearing a burning taper. He braced his bare feet against the walls to keep from sliding. He gave me his free hand. It was strangely cold.

At last we came to a small chamber where a man could stand upright. The taper revealed

carvings. Through another long passage, slightly descending, we came to a rather spacious hall. "The King's Chamber," my companion remarked, lifting his taper after lighting one for me. In the stone floor I noticed a dark opening.

"What is that — where does it lead?"

"Come," was the only answer.

Again he took my hand. He began to go down the steep shaft, he himself descending backward or sidewise to stay my progress as before. Thus we came to a level-floored extension. Through an opening in a side wall he led me down a flight of steps. He counted them aloud as my feet found one after another. Instantly after the seventh he upraised his taper — stood silent — then whispered, "The Queen's Chamber."

I observed recesses in the walls.

"For her children, I think," he commented.

"It does look rather like a family affair," said I, incautiously thinking aloud. Saïd only gave me a passing response, "Yes —. I think so," being absorbed in his own musing.

Presently he added, "And I think many times in my heart, 'The King's Chamber up there — the Queen's Chamber down here — like he

would be guard to her and hiss children.' Just like a man who loved, my gentleman!"

Those last words were surely reminiscent of that small voice in the sand. They undoubtedly caught up the broken end of our conversation when he had said that he himself knew what love can do for a man. Could there be a more fitting time or place for asking my long deferred question? I resolved to trust my guide's leading in this matter also.

"Saïd, that old man at the entrance stopped our talk just when I wanted to ask you about — about something that I should like to know."

"About what the fortune teller say?"

"Yes — yes, Saïd, about what he said."

"My gentleman, I wish to be honest to you. I myself give baksheesh to that old man so he come not in here with us. I want to be here — just you and me — that so I can be honest to you about what that fortune teller say."

"All right, Saïd. If you are willing, tell me this, how did he know about me when he kept saying those words, 'That man, he love,' and all that about the storm, and the rest of his talk?"

"That is it, my gentleman, for what I wish to

be honest to you. He know not about you. He speak not of you when he hear the sand talk."

"Not of me?"

"Not of you, my gentleman. I see this not at first. By and by, when he say many times, 'That man — that man — that man,' and then say, 'he love — he love,' and then tell about the storm, and then how the storm go away — all that — I become sure he speak not of you. But I want no trouble — I say not a word. I be honest to you when he gone — give you money back — all that. He tell you of your servant — only of me, my gentleman."

My question could come now in a form wholly unforeseen.

"So he was telling me of you! Was what he said true — was it true of you?"

"If you wish to know of this, I tell you — listen, my gentleman."

Then Saïd told me this sweet story as we stood together in the Queen's Chamber, deep in the pyramid of Menkewrē.

He was married very young. Most Bedouin men take wives in their youth. And none was more happily mated than Saïd.

When he was but little more than twenty-one

his girl wife died. Her babe that never breathed was laid beside her in the grave they made under a palm.

He grieved for her and the child beyond the wont of Bedouin men. "That man, he love," they said of him at first. His tribesmen marveled as time passed. When a year, two years, had gone by, and still he chose no other to be his wife, they could not understand. Bedouin youth and men are not given to such faithful affection to one, living or dead, other Bedouin maidens being fair and plentiful.

At last they began to jest concerning him. "He hard to please," said they with mirth. "That man, he love last year flower — this year flower no good," they would say, in their crude desire to rouse him from wifeless indifference to the living charms of Bedouin womankind.

He bore all this with such patience as he could, knowing their ways and assuring himself that their taunts were less in malice than rough goodwill. He kept himself unembittered, kept himself in friendliness toward his fellows, by living in daily remembrance of her who had loved him and given herself for him. It was, however, a time like that described by the fortune teller —

a time as of the dark and windy tempest, with the roar of rain.

But among the elders, there was one who understood and spoke to his condition of need. This was the man whom he had permitted to press upon me after I had put myself under his care — Abdul, who called himself Mark Twain. This man would say to him now and then, "Saïd, Allah love a lover. Mark Twain, the great Mark Twain, he tell me it.— Forget it not, my boy." Then he would relate how he himself had profited by these words when he too was young and in sorrow.

So passed a few years. And Abdul still kept repeating to him that saying of the man whose name had come to have strange magic as travelers came and went around the pyramids of Gizeh. And Saïd's heart warmed toward Abdul meanwhile.

Now Abdul had a daughter —"many children," as the Arab says, meaning sons, and one daughter. To her he had given the name Zareefah — this name, because it signified "beautiful lamb," and Abdul had been a shepherd.

Zareefah was now in the first blush of ripening womanhood. Many had sought her in marriage.

But the girl's heart had not welcomed any suitor for her husband. Rich offers had been made to Abdul for her, after the Bedouin custom — so many goats, so many measures of wheat, a yoke of oxen, a camel, a rifle, and much money as the desert men count riches. Once, besides all these, a sheikh of another tribe had offered Abdul a daughter of his own for wife to one of Abdul's sons — bride for bride and all else besides, if his own son might have Abdul's Zareefah, she was so famed for beauty.

But the maiden pleaded to remain with her own tribe, and the father, poor as he was, heeded his daughter's voice. His tribesmen mocked him for such folly. But Abdul had not forgot the words spoken to him when he was childless; and he remembered now that love had brought him Allah's favor in abundance of children. He would not risk shutting off that source of his manhood's happiness, though he was now growing old — would not obstruct the channel by which its blessings came to him, even as the Nile's water coursing through the little canals men made turned otherwise desert land into fruitful fields. No, none could persuade old Abdul to be unloving now.

So the daughter had her way as to the alien sheikh's overture. And Saïd's heart was all the while warming toward Abdul because he seemed to understand and spoke kindly to him; yes, and also because he was kind to Zareefah.

Though the young men derided, not so the maidens of his people. Some innocently beamed upon him, he perceived, thinking to cheer his loneliness by their girlish graces, he did not doubt, for Bedouin daughters are most coy, however kind. Some, more discerning, were gravely gentle and decorous toward him, as if honoring one who was faithful in love. Among the latter was Abdul's Zareefah.

Her loveliness no man's eyes could fail to discern. Her hair hung in rich jet braids, framing her person like a picture set off by polished ebony. Soft lights shone in her eyes, the brighter because the quietness there was so deep and dark. Her dusky cheek had the clear tinting which pure Bedouin blood can impart, nose and chin were lightly arched, and her forehead had the subtle charm in women of being low. Her parted lips revealed that even pearliness within, which is the wonder of young Bedouin mouths. And her voice, in speech or laughter, was vel-

veted like a dove's. All this was made clear to me in the Queen's Chamber.

What all men saw Saïd descried — but dimly at first, his eyes being holden of remembered joy. At length life had its way with death. To Saïd the sight of Zareefah became as when he watched daybreak on the desert. There was a sense of darkling pureness uprising through gloom, hushed and fresh and sweet, like the dawn-tints quickening amid a world of still shadows. When he looked upon her, as when he looked upon the desert daybreak, "Allah is good, Allah is great," rose to his lips. So Zareefah awoke thoughts of a new day for Saïd. "When one day is gone, after the night Allah himself brings morning and another day — Allah be praised!" said he, deep in his heart.

By and by, according to the Bedouin way in such matters, Saïd's chosen friends appeared at Abdul's door. And coffee was offered them as the custom is. And they refused to drink, with the usual intent. Then Abdul asked why they would not drink, well knowing the reason. And they said, "We will not take any coffee from you until you give your daughter Zareefah for a wife

to our friend." Then Abdul asked, "Who is this friend of yours?" The men answered, "Saïd." Soon they were drinking Abdul's black coffee together.

After that they began to talk of the price that Saïd should pay Abdul for his Zareefah. The old father was a true Bedouin and named a great sum, appraising his daughter at a queen's ransom, as Bedouin sires are wont to do at such times. The men gallantly conceded that she was worth all he asked and more. But they were friends — the transaction should not halt between friends. Then one man asked, "What will you take off for me?" And Abdul said he would forego fifty goats for this friend's sake. And when another asked the same question, a yoke of oxen was yielded up for him. So at last a bridal price that Saïd could pay was agreed upon. Then the men returned to the bridegroom with gladness. And the dawn had brought the new day's light to Saïd.

And what of Zareefah?

Saïd underwent that ebb and flow of lover hopes which is as worldwide in the breasts of men as the rise and fall of sea-waters on all shores of the globe. Had she not closed her heart to

many suitors? Yet, when the tide was at the full, he chose a man to be his spokesman, and two to go with him as witnesses.

These three appeared at Zareefah's tent door. The two remained outside to harken. They heard the man who entered ask if she would accept him as the representative of her bridegroom. They heard a low "eiwa," which is the "yes" dear to all the world, as Arab maidens say it.

Then the registering man of the tribe came, and in the name of Mohammed two names were written together in his book. They were Saïd and Zareefah.

In due time the Bedouin folk gathered for the fantasia, and great was the merry-making. Then came the closing of a tent set apart wherein the bridal pair must remain for seven days. So Saïd and Zareefah were wed.

The new day that Abdul's daughter brought was still in its happy morning. And still the tribesmen called Saïd The Lover, while the bright day went on toward its noontide and evening. Therefore the fortune teller, seeing that I had chosen Saïd from among them all, had taken it upon himself to relate to me the story

of my servant. It was the common memory of Saïd's love for the dead and delight in the living — a choice bit of tribal lore — that he rehearsed. And the small voice heard in the sand was only the mystical Arab way of giving embodiment to thoughts of many hearts concerning my friend Saïd.

This is the story I gathered from all that was told me in the Queen's Chamber far down under the pyramid of Menkewrē.

"And what did he mean by those last words?" I asked, as we turned to begin the long climb back to daylight.

Saïd lighted a fresh taper. "What words?" said he, his face lit by the glow.

I repeated the lines as fixed in my memory.

"Go east, go west,
Go east, go west,
The camel is good
But the tent is best."

A smile played over his listening countenance. "They sing many songs at the time of the marriage. They sing,

'I'll marry none but the Bedawy
Who rides with his tilted head-dress,'

— all that. He would sing for you, I think, one little song of the time when a man ride far over the desert all day and he come to hiss home when the sun go down. This iss it, may be, my gentleman."

When we came out, evening was tinting the desert and the valley of the Nile. The old Arab still guarding the entrance received more baksheesh before he could ask for it. I took my leave of Saïd and strolled up into the hush of the sand mounds to watch the sun's farewell. Presently I heard a voice calling. It said, "If any these men follow you, my gentleman, just say to them, 'Saïd my servant'— they go away — they go away sure." Then my servant turned his steps toward the plot of green on which his eyes had lingered when the fortune teller left us.

Looking down upon him as he strode over the sand, I saw him wave his hand toward his home. In the sunset's backlight I saw a woman standing at the edge of the sand's smoothness. Her arm was raised to shade her eyes from the westward radiance. And I thought I saw a babe held high in the evening light when Saïd waved to her.